

## Lower Woodward Avenue Historic District

General boundaries: Woodward Avenue between State and Clifford.

Local  
State  
State Marker  
National        ✓        2/12/99



1401-11 Woodward



### **Historic overview:**

This Lower Woodward Avenue Historic District holds a collection of late nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial buildings by several noted architects. Woodward Avenue is also significant as a part of Judge Augustus B. Woodward's original 1807 plan for Detroit. Detroit's main street and destination shopping avenue, it exemplified the early decades of dynamic growth of the city.

Judge Woodward created a street network for the city of Detroit and named what he thought would be the main street after his idol and friend President Thomas Jefferson. Woodward Avenue was planned as a secondary avenue, but by 1920 grew to be the busiest intersection in the U.S. at Michigan Avenue. In 1925, State and Woodward had the most active pedestrian crossing corner in the U.S.

Many businesses that define Detroit's commerce got their start on the corridor. For example: Vernors, Sanders and Winkelman's. Going downtown to Woodward to shop or to the movies was an event; women wore a hat and white gloves, and men a jacket. Other famous stores on Woodward included S.S. Kresge Co., F.W. Woolworth Co., and J. L. Hudson Co.

In reaction to the image of downtown after the 1967 riot, Woodward undertook one of the most visible changes in its history. In 1977, sidewalks were made into a pedestrian mall. The widened walks were repaved with brick, and trees in large planters were added (trees had not been seen on Lower Woodward since the 1870s), as well as benches, art and new lighting. No traffic was allowed except buses. Many other cities in the U.S. attempted similar "mallification" of their main streets. The long history Lower Woodward Avenue represents Detroit's transformation into a modern city.

